

HOLDING ON AND LETTING GO

Sept. 20, 2020

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center's virtual Sunday worship celebration. I'm Richard Maraj, senior minister, and it is a joy to be able to bring you our messages virtually. And it's an even greater joy to know that you are attending and watching.

We are so excited: October the 4th at 9 a.m., outdoors, we are re-starting our LIVE services! Just Sunday for now; Wednesday will continue being recorded. But we are very, very excited to see everybody and be together in as safe a way as possible. Of course, 100%, wearing masks all the time on campus; we are going to be spacing out the chairs. And you can space your chair, too, so we maintain appropriate social distance. We'll tell you a few other things [as we get closer], but those are the absolute key. And we'll send you an email with some of the details. But we are EXCITED and looking forward to seeing you live again!

Rev. Lori is going to lead us in a marvelous meditation, and before we get there, we will listen to the choir as they lead us in "Surely the Presence."

Unity Choir (singing remotely):

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place;
I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace.
I can feel the brush of angel's wings;
I see glory on each face.
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming: I invite you to join me in a time of prayer and meditation. As we close our outer eyes, we take in a deep, cleansing breath, and release it slowly. Calming your busy mind. Letting go of anything that's distracting so far. Certainly the world is distracting these days and, when we take time to go into prayer and meditation, it calms every cell of our body. As we breathe in and release it slowly, we feel the presence of God all around us. In us. As us. And through us. In every cell of our body.

In this sacred moment, we recognize our oneness with each other, and with Spirit. That Energy that created us. That sustains us. That vitalizes us. And in these quiet, still moments, we feel God's grace all around us. Grace is that great equalizing force, always urging us two steps forward when we want to take a step backwards. Grace is God's goodness, seeing only the good in us, and nothing else. Grace is calling us higher, to new levels of being. Uplifting our consciousness out of the old, mundane into higher levels of wisdom, where we know exactly the next step – the next right thing to do. That God's wisdom is infinite, and that we participate in that wisdom in the silence. We know that God is love: unconditional love, no matter what we do. God loves us completely with a love so deep and so profound that it neutralizes everything else. That it's a catalyst for moving us forward, so that we can not only love ourselves at deeper levels, but love each other: every person, every plant, every animal. The whole earth and everything across the cosmos. Because, truly, it's all God.

And so we take just a few moments to move more deeply into the silence to that sacred place within, where we feel God's grace.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time together. For prayer and meditation that brings us into the higher consciousness of your great and abiding love for us. God, we say thank you for all of our blessings: each and every one of them. We know all our good comes for you, O, God. Love us; bring us joy. Create amazing relationships. Bring us prosperity. And for this we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

SONG

Rusty Ferracane: "I'm Letting Go of Holding On" (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)

I'm letting go of holding on.
God is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
I'm letting go of holding on.
Seeking first the kingdom of God.

I let go of the feelings that feed on lack and greed.
I let go of the reasons keeping me in need.
I let go of the feeling that there's never enough,
And I stop holding on to what is not love.

I'm letting go of holding on.
God is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
I'm letting go of holding on.
Seeking first the kingdom of God.

We breathe in, we breathe out;
It's all give and take.
They're one with each other,
For all of goodness' sake.
The loaves and the fishes were blessed, then released,
And barely enough turned into a feast.

I'm letting go of holding on.
God is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
I'm letting go of holding on.
Seeking first the kingdom of God.
Seeking first the kingdom of God.
The kingdom of God!

[Light applause]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj *[clapping]*: Thank you, Rusty! That was fabulous! That was just, just fabulous! Thanks, too, Craig! You guys ... you always do such a great job with our music, and we appreciate it greatly.

So why did the Miami Dolphin get charged with a personal foul? Because he tripped a player on "porpoise"! *[Simulates "rim shot" drum roll and laughs]*

When do you put a cow in an elevator? When you want to raise the “steaks”! [Chuckles]

Big finish now! What do you call a seasick turkey? A wobble gobble! [Simulates another “rim shot” drum roll and laughs]

I love these jokes! I hope you do, too! [Laughs] But anyway, now to the serious stuff!

This morning I want to talk about two invaluable abilities that we have that literally shape our lives. That literally shape who we are. They shape our feelings, our experiences and our relationships. And those two abilities are: the ability of holding on, and the ability of letting go. Holding on and letting go seem like they’re simple, but they’re actually powerful life skills, and powerful spiritual practices, because they attract and impact every area of our lives.

One of my absolute favorite quotes – and you’ll recognize it if you took my Prosperity class – is a quote by Havelock Ellis, who was born in 1859. He was an English physician and social reformer. And he said these words: *“All the art of living lies in the fine mingling of letting go and holding on.”* All the art of living lies in the fine mingling of letting go and holding on!

So what if I told you that who you are today, and how your life is today, is directly related to the things that you have held on to, or the things that you have let go? And what if I told you that who you become in the future will be directly related to the things you hold on to now, and the things that you let go? Do you believe that’s true? The correct answer is, “Yes!”

Dr. Joe Dispenza has a wonderful quote that really underscores the power of what I’m talking about today. He said, *“Ninety-five percent of who we are by the time we’re 35 years old is a set of a memorized behaviors and emotional reactions that create and solidify our identity subconsciously.”* And what this is saying is that we are a collection of the attitudes and beliefs that we’ve held on to. That we are a collection of the things that we have let go and released. You know, we become the thoughts and feelings we hold on to, and we become the thoughts and feelings that we let go. And I love that quote, because it talks about the “art” of living. Doesn’t that sound beautiful? The “art” of living! Because what that is trying to convey is that we have a skill and a capacity and creativity to create and shape our lives like art. And it lies in the fine mingling – “fine” means high quality ... mixing and balancing – of letting go and holding on.

As you try to tune right in to what fine mingling means, it really means to know what to hold on to, and to know what to let go. Because sometimes we hold on to things that we should let go. And let go of things that we should hold on to.

So I ask you: Is there something in your life that you’re holding on to right now that, deep down, you know you should let go? And is there something you have let go that you know you would be best served by holding on?

You know, sometimes we have trouble with finding this “mingling” balance of things to hold on, and of things to let go of. And I think part of the reason is because we have a skewed belief and mindset of what holding on is, and what letting go, and what they mean.

You know, most human beings have a tendency to hold on all the time. You know, we are born with something called a “palmar grasp reflex.” If you put your finger in a baby’s palm, it will automatically grasp it. We have certain aspects of us that just hold on, because we associate it with being safe, being secure. Being comfortable and familiar. We tend to hold on to things a lot, thinking it’s a good idea to hold on – it’s smart to hold on. It makes our lives better. It’s positive to hold on.

And we get to holding on and practicing it so much – and being so good at it – we sometimes hold on to things that aren’t good for us. Sometimes we hold on to jobs that really don’t fulfill us. Sometimes we hold on to friendships and relationships that really are unhealthy or even toxic. We hold on to the pain

of the past. We hold on to guilt and shame and feelings of unworthiness. We hold on to limiting beliefs and negative and false truths about ourselves, about others, and about how life works. We hold on to everything, including “stuff”! You know, many people are “pack rats,” just holding on. You know that show, *Hoarders*? That’s holding on gone wild! Closets and garages just full of stuff! Do you know one of the leading industries over the last 10 years is storage? That we want to hold on and hold on ... and we’re just holding on to holding on! Of all kinds of stuff! We hold on to the same words and same thoughts. Sometimes, studies show, that 95% of what we thought today we thought yesterday. That we tend to hold on to some of the same ideas and beliefs.

And what happens when we keep holding on like that: we get stuck. We can’t move forward. We keep reliving the past, and we just can’t move on.

Now, holding on is also very good! Holding on to good habits. Holding on to a good, positive attitude. Holding on to our faith. Holding on to spiritual practices. Holding on to a positive self-image. Holding on to our goals and dreams. So there are good things!

But when life isn’t working, it usually means that we’re holding on to something that isn’t healthy and good for us. Like holding on to fear, anger or shame. Eckhart Tolle says that everybody has in them what he calls a “pain body.” And it is a collective level of energy of all the unresolved things that we just stuffed and held inside of ourselves, without being honest or processing or acknowledging moving through those feelings.

So it’s important for us to ask ourselves from time to time – when life isn’t going as well, or when we feel stuck: What am I holding on to? What is it that I’m holding on that just isn’t healthy or good for me? Because the truth is: We have this tendency to hold on. And, sometimes, if we don’t use it well, it can actually make our lives regress, rather than progress.

And we associate being safe with holding on and, with letting go, we actually think letting go is scary! *“If I let go, what’s going to happen?!? Things will fall apart! My life will get worse! Maybe I’ll lose everything!”* You know, we think of letting go as being weak and soft and giving up and giving in. But the truth is: Letting go is actually liberating! It’s very empowering. It is freeing ourselves and opening ourselves to peace, to positivity and possibilities. There is something amazing about the practice of just letting go.

So let’s do it now, everybody. Let’s just take a deep breath. *[Breathes in deeply]* Breathe out, and just feel yourself letting go. *[Breathes out deeply]* Again, deep breath. *[Breathes in deeply]* Just relax and let go. *[Breathes out deeply]* And I guarantee, every one of us is probably a little calmer just by intentionally holding the idea to let go and relax. That’s how powerful holding on and letting go is!

One of the things is: We can’t hold on to everything in life! And we can’t let go of everything in life! So we have to learn that balance of: How do we “mingle” holding on and letting go?

You know, I watch some sports show, and there’s a particular sports show. They have a segment called “Buy or Sell.” They tell you a line – you know, like, *“Are the Arizona Cardinals going to win the Super Bowl this year?”* – and they say, *“Are you buying that? Or are you selling it?”* And, you know, buying and selling is like holding on and letting go! In life, things are always coming at us: ideas and what people say. The question is: Do we buy it – or do we hold on to it? Or do we let it go? Do we accept it or reject it? Do we ingest it, or do we deny it and ignore it? Because what we buy – or what we hold on to – becomes a part of us. What we reject or sell, you know, we allow it to not affect us, but that creates a part of who we are.

You know, sometimes holding on is a great thing that helps us. But sometimes holding on hurts us. Sometimes letting go is a great thing that helps us! And sometimes letting go hurts us. So how do we determine what to let go and what to hold on to? What to buy? Or what to sell?

And in Scripture, there's a fabulous parable. And there are two parables that Jesus says, and here's what it says. Matthew 13, beginning with Verse 44. It says, *"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy goes and sells all that he has and buys the field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."*

Isn't it interesting that it emphasized twice – of saying it twice – the importance of selling something lesser to gain something greater. To buy something of greater value. That's how we determine holding on and letting go is: Does it serve us in a greater way? Does it affirm the life we want? The kind of person we want to be? And relationships we want to have?

You know, there's such an important thing in being discerning: having a level of discernment of what is good for us and what is not. And saying *"Yes!"*... There's a wonderful line in Scripture; it says, *"Let your 'yes' be 'Yes!' and your 'no' be 'No!'"* And it means: Be discerning. Be clear about what you want to hold on to and what it is that you need to let go.

Now, in that story, God is the treasure. God is the thing: our relationship, our connection to being at one with that Source. One with that Resource that is always available: all the wisdom, insight and knowledge for what's our highest and best.

I love what it says in the Book of James. It says, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault. And it will be given to you."* So if we ask God! Sometimes it's important for us to say, *"God, is it best for me to hold on to this thing?"* Or, *"Spirit, is it best for me to let go of this, and to listen?"*

Have you ever made a decision without thinking? Did you ever make an impulse decision or make a decision without prayer or really a lot of thought with it? Have you ever tried to force something to happen, because you just thought it would make your life better? Life is calling all of us to be more discerning! About what we buy and sell. About what we hold on to, and what we let go of.

Now, I would have to say – of the two – I think by far the hardest of the two is letting go. Letting go is not easy in any way. Letting go of the pain of the past. Letting go of maybe being hurt. Letting go of some false things that we've been told about ourselves. It's tough to let it go. But letting go is powerful! And the hardest one, of course, is forgiveness. And the Bible tells us over and over again how important it is to let go. How important it is to forgive.

You remember in Philippians, Paul says, *"Forgetting what is behind, and pressing forward to what is ahead, I move forward to win the prize, which has been called for me heavenward in Jesus Christ"*? Also, another one in Scripture is the story of Lot's wife. When they were leaving Sodom and Gomorrah, they were given the instruction, *"Do not look back!"* And what did she do? She looked back, and she turned into a pillar of salt. She was preserved there, and couldn't move forward.

There's a wonderful line in the Book of Matthew that says that, *"Anyone who puts their hand to a plowshare and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of heaven."* And what that means is: When you're plowing forward, you actually need to look towards the horizon so that all the seeds will drop into perfect soil. But when you look back, the plow moves, and the seeds don't land where they should, and it actually reduces the quality of our harvest. So that holding on to things which – looking back and holding on to resentment – actually reduces our harvest, or our ability to be joyful, because we're expending energy looking in the wrong direction.

And so, from time to time, we all need to ask ourselves a question, is: What do I need to let go that I'm holding on to right now? And in what way is life calling me to hold on to something right not? Because whatever decision we make in what we hold on and we let go is definitely going to shape our lives and shape who we become.

You know, sometimes I think it's really good for us to pause and reflect on the good things that we have held on to. To reflect on the things that we have held on to that have shaped us to be who we are today. Like, I bet if we look back on our life, we can remember a time where we held on to our faith – we held on to prayer – during a tough time, and it got us through. And that helped shaped us to who we are today. I'll be we've had times where we held on to a vision and dream when it seemed like it wasn't going to happen. And holding on to that helped shape us and create better for our lives.

You know, maybe we have held on to our sense of humor! Our joyfulness, even in difficult times, to make ourselves smile and feel a little bit lighthearted. Maybe we held on to our integrity and character when someone was being unkind or cruel to us, but we held to our level of standard in spite of that. And he helped shape us – and our character – to an even greater level. Holding on to the love and support of our family and friends when we're going through a difficult time can be a great thing to hold on to. To get through the grief or through the loss. And through a time of change.

So what is it that you've held on to that's created who you are today? I remember one of the things that I held on to was ... I had a karate instructor. After my car accident, I was really down, and he came and taught me karate sitting down. And he taught me discipline. He taught me how to use my mind. He'd always say, *"Richard, your mind's a computer; program it well, and it'll serve you well! Write down a thought or a question you have before you go to sleep. Go to sleep, and your mind will bring these things to you."* And he taught me how to be aware of myself, and how to be aware of my surroundings. I haven't seen him in 30 years, but I've held on to those teachings and all the things that I learned from him, because they really have helped make me who I am today.

Has there been a person in your life who has influenced you? Who's said the right thing at the right time? And that you held on to that? And it's helped make you who you are today? Maybe more appreciative? More strong? And more joyful?

Remembering the things we've held on to is good, that have made us who we are. And also remembering some of the things that we've released that were good. That maybe we released something about our worthiness to make ourselves know that we are valuable, and that we are important. Maybe we let go of a relationship or a job that wasn't serving us in the best way. Or releasing some guilt or shame.

One of the best things I ever did in terms of releasing was when I forgave the driver of the car on that day that I was paralyzed in that car accident. I was so filled with self-pity, feeling sorry for myself, feeling angry at him that he ruined my life. And it was the greatest gift I gave myself was to forgive. To let go. To turn the page. Because it opened up for me finally feeling peace. Feeling a sense of positivity and empowerment about moving my life forward, and moving towards goals and new dreams and possibilities for my life.

You know, we do things of letting go that really make a huge difference in our lives. They help us change a course of negativity to positivity. Lighten and brighten us. And lift us to a higher level. So what are the things that you have let go that have helped make you who you are today?

One of the things is: I don't think we pause enough all the time to acknowledge, to appreciate and celebrate who we are, and what a good life we're living. Sometimes we need to stop and look at how far we've come. Of the things that we've held on to that have helped get us stronger. The things we've let go that help us move forward with our lives.

There's a wonderful line in Scripture that says – in the Parable of Talents – *"Well done, my good and faithful servant. Well done. You have done well with what I've given you; now you will share in more of your master's joy."* And, to me, when we learn to "mingle" the art of holding on and letting go, we will get to share in more of God's joy in greater ways.

Every one of us has the ability to master the “art of living.” To know that we have the skill. To know that we have the capability, and we have the creativity to use our decisions and our choices to advance our life in a greater way. That who we are is a reflection of letting go and holding on. Who we’re going to be is a reflection of that. We just have to master and work hard at the fine mingling of letting go and holding on.

God bless you all!

OFFERING

Rev. Lori Fleming: It’s that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. Thank you so much for the checks that you’ve sent in, for the donations online: for all the ways that you’re supporting us in ministry, even though we can’t be present physically.

In just a couple of weeks, we’ll be meeting out on the lawn, and we’re really grateful for that!

And so I invite you to take your offering in your hands, and say with me our offering blessing: *“Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive.”* And so we say thank you, Mother/Father God, for these gifts, for these tithes and these offerings. We know that they are given in love; they are received in love; and that they move through this ministry with the energy of divine love out into the world as good. And that each giver is blessed: heaped up, pressed down and overflowing, for that is the Law. And so it is. Thank you, God, for our amazing abundance! Amen.

CLOSING

Rev. Lori Fleming: Well, thank you for being with us. We hope that you’ve been uplifted in some small or maybe some great big way! I’m doing my “This Is Not Your Grandmother’s Bible Study” class Monday at 7 p.m.; you might want to join me for that! It’s on Zoom, like we’re doing so much of everything.

And now will you join me as we listen to the choir sing the Peace Song?

Unity Choir (singing remotely):

Let there be peace on Earth;
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on Earth;
The peace that was meant to be.

With God as Creator,
Fam'ly all are we.
Let us walk with each other
In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me,
Let this be the moment now.
With ev'ry step I take,
Let this be my joyous vow:
To take each moment
And live each moment
In peace eternally.

Let there be peace on Earth;
And let it begin with me!

Rev. Lori Fleming: And will you join me in the Prayer for Protection?

The light of God surrounds us;

The love of God enfolds us;

The power of God protects us;

The presence of God watches over us.

Wherever we are, God is.

And all is well. Have a blessed week!

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